

Appln No. 10/715,684
Reply to Office action of October 13, 2006

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1.- 16. (Cancelled).

17. (Currently Amended) A nerve root retractor and sucker comprising:
a handle having proximal and distal ends,
a nerve root retractor/sucker shaft having a proximal open end and a distal open end ends and defining a central passage therebetween, wherein the proximal end of the shaft is connected to the distal end of the handle, and wherein the angle between the shaft and the axis of the handle or the axis may be controllably and fixedly varied along at least one axis;
a suction source in fluid communication with the distal opening of the shaft, wherein one or both of the handle and shaft define a suction fluid path between the suction source and the distal opening;
at least one suction control vent disposed along the suction fluid path such that closing the at least one vent increases the level of suction at the distal opening, and such that opening the at least one vent decreases the level of suction at the distal opening; and
a retractor blade disposed immediately proximate to at the distal end of the shaft.
18. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the angle of the shaft to the handle may be varied polyaxially.
19. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the angle of the shaft may be varied in at least a 60 degree arc.
20. (Currently Amended) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the shaft is connected to the handle in a lockable ball and socket arrangement.

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21. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the connection between the shaft and handle forms an airtight connection.

22. (Currently Amended) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the shaft is detachabledetachably connected to the handle.

23. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the handle has distal and proximal openings and defines a hollow passage therebetween, and wherein the proximal opening is in fluid communication with the suction source and the distal opening is in fluid communication with the proximal opening of the shaft.

24. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 23, wherein the at least one suction control vent is disposed on the handle.

25. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, having at least two suction control vents.

26. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 25, wherein the at least two suction control vents have different diameters.

27. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the shaft is made of a material selected from the group consisting of stainless steel, plastic, and titanium.

28. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the shaft is made of a material that is malleable at room temperature.

29. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the shaft has a length between about 80 and about 220mm.

30. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the retractor blade has a width of about 5 to about 10mm.

31. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the distal end of the shaft forms about a 135 degree angle with the proximal end of the shaft.

32. (Currently Amended) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the handle includes a non-gripslip surface.

33. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the retractor blade is detachably connected to the shaft.

34. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the retractor blade is made of a malleable material.

35. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein at least one of the length and width of the retractor blade is variable.

36. (Currently Amended) A nerve root retractor and sucker system comprising:
a handle having proximal and distal ends,

a plurality of nerve root retractor/sucker shafts each having a proximal open end and a distal open endends and defining a central passage therebetween, wherein the proximal end of each shaft may be detachably connected to the distal end of the handle, and wherein the axis along the distal end of each of the shafts and has a length of between about 80 and 220mm, and wherein the angle between the shaft and the axis of the handle may be controllably and fixedly varied along at least one axis;

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a suction source in fluid communication with the distal opening of the attached shaft, wherein one or both of the handle and shaft define a suction fluid path between the suction source and the distal opening;

at least one suction control vent disposed along the suction fluid path such that closing the at least one vent increases the level of suction at the distal opening, and such that opening the at least one vent decreases the level of suction at the distal opening; and

a retractor blade disposed immediately proximate to ~~at~~ the distal end of each of the plurality of shafts,

wherein ~~at least one of the angle and the~~ length of at least two of the plurality of shafts are different.

37. (Original) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 36, wherein at least one of the length and width of the retractor blade of at least two of the plurality of shafts are different.

38. (New) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 36, wherein at least one of the shafts is a compound shape comprising a first straight portion interconnected between the distal end of the handle and the proximal end of a second straight portion through two angled regions such that the axis of the two straight portions are parallel, wherein the axes of the two straight portions form angles of less than 180 degrees with the axis of the handle.

39. (New) The nerve root retractor and sucker described in claim 17, wherein the shaft is a compound shape comprising a first straight portion interconnected between the distal end of the handle and the proximal end of a second straight portion through two angled regions such that the axis of the two straight portions are parallel, wherein the axes of the two straight portions form angles of less than 180 degrees with the axis of the handle.